

CITIES IN CRISIS: POLICE AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS  
 Tampa Police Institute  
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Just a few weeks ago I had the great privilege of participating in a Police and Community Relations Institute in the Mid-West, in which were to be found the most widely varied groups I had ever encountered in such sessions. In addition to a fine representation of municipal, county and state law-enforcement officers, there were Negro and white adult liberals, white university radicals, black university revolutionaries, black militants including Black Panther representation, Chicanos representing the Mexican-American community in protest, and homosexuals - all raising their voices in protest against one or more factors in status-quo management of human affairs.

This kind of assembly would suggest a certain approach to violent exchange and emotional dead-end to the three-day institute. On the contrary, it was one of the most exciting demonstrations of man's ability to show rational behavior when he decides to be grown-up in his approach to serious problems. And, it was not, namby-pamby; it was not burdened with cloying sweetness of excessive politeness and cold sterility. It was, in fact, a hard-hitting, "tell-it-like-it-is" experience, in which the "rap session" disciplines protected each participant in his right to speak in his own idiom and out of his own experience, without censorship on anyone's part. They all were so adult in adhering to these ground rules, that everyone took comfort in the fact that he could speak his mind, and be respected in his right to do so without fear of offending or of being offended. Strong medicine! Few of us of my generation and yours, have been schooled in this communication tactic, and few of us find it easy to adopt or accept. Herein lies our first, great roadblock toward repairing the community human relations climate.

But in this experience is to be found a lesson of profound importance to all of us who carry a burden of concern about many of the problems in our age, that have grown out of our inability or unwillingness to communicate. First part of this lesson is that of accepting a fair assumption that the opposition, of whatever nature, may have some valid complaint to offer; secondly, that whatever the complaint, valid or invalid from our own point of view, the very least one can do is to give fair and honest hearing to that point of view as the only means whereby one can assess the true validity of his own opinions on the subject; and that "fair and honest hearing" in every instance means to adjust our hearing mechanism to the idiom, the tone, the gestures by which the dissenter is accustomed to express himself. Only then can real communication begin.

At every turn, we are confronted with evidence of the seriousness of our communications gap. Terms I may use, seeming perfectly clear and understandable to me, may convey something entirely different to the other fellow. I'll never recognize this difference until we have exchanged ideas long enough and honestly enough and tolerantly enough, that we may begin to find the way to mutual comprehension, perception and understanding. Some of us use perfectly good American terms like "law and order", or conversely "violence" or "brutality". Do they mean the same to all who

hear them? Definitely not! Each of these terms in today's usage is emotionally loaded, carrying a special meaning to those who are "in", those for whom existing laws and regulations were shaped and who, accordingly, are well protected within their own socio-economic milieu. But for those who are "out"; who are in protest against those rules and regulations fashioned in another day and for another social climate, the terms convey a vastly different and threatening connotation. How will we ever know which is the more valid for today, for our present community, and to meet our current problems, unless we compare notes and learn to adjust to each other's semantical differences.

A reading of the reports of the Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, the so-called Eisenhower Commission, continually discloses the barriers that prevent communication and increase automatically the suspicions, frustrations and conflicts that underlie present-day social-ferment. For instance, the repeated use of the term "violence" today is caused to mean almost without question the spectre of black violence visited against white persons. The initial public notices given to the emerging Black Muslims a few years ago caused the newly appointed Police Commissioner in an eastern city to announce his program as requiring immediately the securing of police dogs and the launching of a crackdown on Black Muslims who, until that time had not been charged with any hostile forays against the white community. The two proposals inescapably and naturally appeared to be inter-related, and threatening! Today, just a few years later, ascertainment of location of a Black Panther cell or lair is the signal for launching "preventive Raids" (based on suspicion only), where bullets instead of tear gas or other less lethal devices are employed by those who say they deplore "violence" and who are operating ostensibly in the interest of "law and order". Not only the objects of such action, but many uninvolved observers, will place vastly different values on the common usage of these terms.

The truth of this assertion is being borne out in the current action of many liberal, non-violent advocates of peaceful change, who heretofore have repudiated the Black Panther philosophy but who today are demanding investigation of violent police action. Said a Washington columnist in this connection:

"In adversity, the Black Panthers, a sort of underworld in the civil rights movement, are accomplishing something that no other group has been able to do. They have united the black community in outrage and white liberals in concern. . . . that the outcasts have acquired, perhaps too late, possible friends of the most impeccable respectability."

It becomes more apparent each day that, if black extremism brings about white backlash, then in like measure, police extremism brings "black-lash" (pun intended)

Research has disclosed several facts that refute the myths regarding "black violence." For instance, the history of violence in America, until very recent years, has been the long, bloody story of vigilante action, lynchings and mob action, with white rioting against unprotected black ghettos. The Eisenhower Report gives an

explicit recording of this history, pointing up through documentation, that retaliatory violence on the part of blacks has been because of long-suffering, has been of brief and sporadic nature, and invariably has been more costly to the lives of black people than of white. In very recent years, almost without exception, mass retaliatory action of blacks has been against white-owned property, and black homes. An eminent commentator on the subject (Prof. Charles Tilly, U. of Toronto) makes the understandable distinction between "reactionary" disturbances, which center on rights once enjoyed by the intrenched members of society, but now threatened, and "modern" disturbances which center on rights not yet enjoyed by the dispossessed, but now within reach, as we shift our emphasis into the realm of causation.

It is impossible in this kind of presentation, to document fully, or treat exhaustively with the history, the causation, the trigger factors or the treatment of the social malady called social conflict. It is possible, and it is necessary, to dwell upon the essence of conclusions reached in every serious inquiry or research conducted through the years, on the problem of frictions that occur between police and those in the community who may be identified as the "out-groups". And I think it is very important to stress the often overlooked fact, that the race or skin-color of the "out-group" are not necessarily or basically the irritants leading to oppressive action; they do serve seriously to aggravate the effects of basic irritants already there, viz: poverty, "difference" and powerlessness. I am old enough to remember when southern (and ultimately northern black, and ultimately white) lynch victims provided horrible annual statistics of savage violence; when those troublesome, unrealistic Suffragettes disturbed the peace of the community and plagued smug upholders of "law and order" as they demanded access to the ballot-box; when confrontation between police, the Pinkertons and those seeking the right to organize for labor security meant savagery and "blood in the streets"; when the only sensible way to handle the crazy mob of World War veterans insistent upon receiving bonuses to partially compensate them for their sacrifices, was for mounted officers to club them into submission. I've lived long enough to have soaked up all of the horrors of really, honest-to-God race-rioting which this young generation knows nothing of, and most of the elders have forgotten - from the blood-letting in Detroit, East St. Louis, Elaine, Tulsa, Washington and Chicago of 1917-1919 era, through a similar period of beastliness in the 40's, to the present unrest. "Violence" in America has a long, unbroken, unbridled, sinister meaning to those who have been on the receiving end for generations!

The one footnote I would provide for this historical capsule, is that the forces of "law and order" were arrayed, in each instance, against those who felt deeply that they had reasons to raise the voice of protest against the status quo. Yet, who today would argue that suffragettes, labor working toward organization, or bonus marchers, were anti-American, Communist-inspired radicals bent upon destroying the country? Ridiculous! Because, of course, we have become mature enough now to talk about and reason about and legislate about such things - that is, where women and

labor and veterans are concerned. It is only the anti-American, Communist-inspired parents and students, impatient with the do-nothingness of organized Education, or similarly dangerous, radical blacks who have grown tired of empty promises, who irritate us into irrational, even violent reaction, today!

Without doubt, history will record the period in which we live as one of the very critical turning points in the record of mankind. It is a period of unprecedented rapidity of change; a period in which has emerged man-controlled power capable of destroying the planet; a period marking the realization of man's dream of space travel; but also a period of revolt against authority, standards, values, ethics that were of the "old order"; a period of world-wide conflict and at the same time a period of unequalled intensity in the search for understanding and peace.

Because of technological and scientific development, the world sees mankind taking giant leaps which leave in a bewildered, frustrated state those of us over thirty-nine who still find ourselves measuring progress and problems by the inching steps to which we have been accustomed. And like mankind in all ages, we gladly accept any benefits flowing from change, while at the same time deploring and resisting change! As our society produces the means whereby man may explore space and walk upon the moon, in the unfolding of an unbelievable science-fiction drama, we continue working in the opposite direction of making our own planet uninhabitable by poisoning air, water, soil, bird-life - - and basic human relations, creating incredible hazards for our children and their children, who will also inherit the terribly destructive nuclear weapons of war.

For any of us to assume that the specific problem pin-pointed for this seminar - Police and Community Relations - is an isolated, simplified, temporary manifestation of human cussedness on the local scene, is one of the greatest errors we could commit. But, we must recognize and acknowledge the fact that the bulk of humanity insists upon over-simplification of its most complex problems, before displaying any willingness to tackle them. So it is with the extremely important, key problems of the relations between police and various levels of the community they serve. In any effort directed toward analyzing the problem, we must try to make careful and honest assessments of the actual, the potential and the expected roles of Police service. These three roles are not necessarily the same.

1. First of all, we must constantly remember that Police are the employees, the hired help, of the Establishment, the "Power Structure", the "Old Order", however you may wish to identify the active, articulate leadership of the community. This is true of all police forces in every organized society. As such employees, police have the task of enforcing the rules, standards, even the beliefs, opinions and prejudices that have evolved in the particular society through generations of time. During that same period of time, neglect, selfish indifference and vested interests as they operate on

the human relations front, have brought us to our present state of dislocation and conflict. Meanwhile, this same society, through its specialized leadership, has researched, created, developed knowledge, power and has achieved tremendous gains on the material side of our culture.

2. Secondly, Police stand out in almost everyone's consciousness, as the highly visible symbol of that Establishment they serve; particularly is this true of those segments of the population which find themselves in disagreement with the rules and the methods by which the Establishment perpetuates the status quo. This condition automatically places Police, and any dissident elements of society, in the role, the hostile role, of adversaries, each becoming natural targets for the other's displeasure.
3. The very nature of Police work demands that they possess and wield, many times on the basis of personal judgment (or whim) greater power and authority than is found in any other segment of the population, this of course being necessary. Our Western culture, however, has been built upon a tradition of concern about, suspicion of and resistance to assumption of too much power anywhere, but particularly in the military or para-military forces. These suspicions and fears have been fortified by more than a generation of exposure to the excesses in use of power displayed by European Fascism and Asian Communism. In the domestic scene, fear of police authority is multiplied many times over in those areas of the community where poverty has deprived people of voice and power; has made such people much more vulnerable to any form of exploitation and mistreatment. Possession of great power, too, has its insidious effect upon many human beings drawn into police work, who possess neither the character nor intellect necessary for the proper and legal use of power (Ess.Co.trainee) It is this combination of suspicion, fear and resulting hostility on the one side, and the inability of some officers, on the other side, to adjust sanely to the possession of power, that gives rise to the frequently heard charges of "Police Brutality" first, and secondly, that prompts repeated demands for Civilian Review Boards or comparable civilian controls. Continued and almost universal denial of the one is fatuous, as anyone living in or near a racial ghetto can testify; stubborn refusal to consider some mutually acceptable substitute for the other, is blind stupidity. Neither aspect of this problem can be resolved except through sincere efforts on both sides to enter into communication in a search for peaceful relations.
4. The ambiguities and contradictions prevailing in existing laws, rules and practices sanctioned by society and its Establishment, place upon the shoulders of Police an impossible burden of decision-making. A police officer operating in the street where the action is, is expected instantly to make flawless decisions, the elements of which may take months of

subsequent review, by innumerable highly-trained jurists, in a multitude of courts, ending ultimately in a myriad of disagreements. Again, in such instances, Police are caught in the middle, between a negligent society that permits contradiction and hypocrisy to persist, on the one hand, and the one hand, and the dispossessed victims of such hypocrisy who are resentful and in revolt, on the other.

5. An inescapable part of the work of Police - and the major part - calls for constant exposure to troubled people, and people in trouble. (Please note the significant differential) Through human failure referred to earlier, far too many police and members of the middle class community indulge in the practice of over-simplification, classifying such people as "trouble-makers" or criminals. Frequently, it is almost impossible to distinguish this simplistic error in attitude, from downright cynicism. This cynicism is a constant danger to the minds and emotions of anyone exposed constantly to the seamy side of life, whether police, news-reporter, or teen-aged kid in the ghetto.
6. Considering the unusual demands made by the public upon Police, they are among the most underpaid members of society. Accordingly, recruitment levels are severely restricted; time, material and leadership for training sorely inadequate; and manpower needs rarely if ever fully met in order to cope with the tasks at hand. A Logical and desirable quest for professional status in police work is blocked inevitably by the limitations thus imposed. In turn, these restrictions produce in Police a sensitive attitude observable in sharply defined Minority groups in the population. Among Police, it is called esprit de corps. An ironic example of this minority group defensiveness that is exhibited by police and by racial groups, is an almost universal practice of closing ranks to protect even the evil-doer among them. To add to the irony of the situation, each group continues to complain about such action as observed in the other.

These six factors are present in Police forces in every society that purports to be democratic in nature. These are the natural, inescapable burdens which police must carry as long as society remains indifferent to its own responsibility to a healthy, continuing program of Law and Order, with Justice. They pose a number of basic questions: "How best to adjust to the task of carrying these burdens?" "What in our recruitment and training methods can we do, as a total community, to overcome the various handicaps imposed?" (My recent assignment-N. Y. training schedules) "What help can Police obtain in the community, to break through the barriers of their own minority group defensiveness, to open doors to communication with all levels of society?" "Do we and should we seek greater Police power, more military equipment and training, or find some as yet untried substitute

toward more police efficiency that can be identified and developed for us by science?" "Is closer communion with spokesmen from society's several segments potentially an advantage or disadvantage - should police welcome or fear civilian involvement?" "How much do we really know about these questions, and how much will our answers be dictated by our fears and prejudices of the past?" I am bold to suggest that your seminar sessions may profit you greatly by candid exploration of these and related questions.

But what about the employers of Police - the American Public, the overseer role for which is exercised more directly by the decision-makers in the community, referred to earlier as "The Establishment"? The plight of Police, in terms of income, conditions of work, degree of community cooperation, creative thinking, research and development, almost universally is greeted by apathy, penuriousness, unrealistic and often cruel expectations on the part of the public...

- ...a Public that seems to display devilish glee in subverting laws designed by its legislative bodies to control traffic, gambling, drug use, interpersonal and intergroup violence;
- ...a Public that persists in expecting a double standard of law enforcement, with race, social status, economic class and political alignment as the determinants;
- ...a Public that demands superlative performance from its police, in intellect, legal wisdom, physical bravery, moral rectitude and superhuman control of passions, denying them the right to have weaklings and rascals in their midst, as are to be found in all other groups of human beings;
- ...a Public that refuses to recognize, acknowledge and repair the social, economic and political inequities out of which come human frustration, cynicism, anger, despair, rebellion, in predictable progression to the point of widespread contempt for law, to open conflict and violence;
- ...a Public that casually places the full burden upon Police, of controlling the conflicts that are bound to arise in such a climate, criticising them harshly for any failures or defections growing out of society's contradictions and hypocrisies.

The third element in this Turbulent Triangle of social unrest, is the inevitable result of the combination of the two previously discussed: the peculiar plight and attitudes of the Police, and the negligence of the Public. Now we discuss the social phenomenon which I shall label the "step-child syndrome". More than 35 million Americans are so afflicted, being the dispossessed among us. They are the poor, the ignorant, the Spanish-speaking peoples of the East and the Southwest; poor white of the urban and rural ghettos; American Indians in and near the American-style concentration camps, and the Blacks who are everywhere!

These are the victims of the many forms of exploitation over which they have had little or no control, ranging from denial of the basic right to full, rounded and usable education and training, of access to free competition for jobs, of freedom to escape the insidious influence of slum-living, to the denial of right to have access to all the benefits out of which a human being may fashion his own identity, self-esteem and spiritual freedom. This simple fact of life has been known for generations, with every imaginable kind of research evidence and documentation to back it up from De Tocqueville in the 19th Century to the present. As far back as the year 1886, Frederick Douglass, escaped slave turned crusading abolitionist, said:

"The American people have this lesson to learn: That where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob, and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe."

Such people represent the main body of the vast army of Americans who are in protest or in various stages of revolt against the status quo - The Establishment. Within the decade now closing, their ranks have been swelled to unknown proportions, as white, college-trained youth become more socially motivated, more articulate, more action-oriented, with the generation gap adding one more dimension to causes of unrest in our society.

As people in protest against the current order of things, they find themselves in an adversary relationship with the Police, no matter what the nature of their protest action. The blue jeans and beards, the wierd dress and unkempt hair of the Hippies a very few years back, were enough to prompt vigorous Police action in various parts of the country, as were public pronouncements by spokesmen for Black Muslims and Black Panthers, each in their time.

Here then, are three facets of the single community problem - Police and Community Relations - influenced as they are by the insecurities, fears and demands for change that are part of present-day world-wide ferment. Here, we have had brief opportunity to review (1) the relations between Police and the affluent, approved part of society; (2) Police confrontation with the underprivileged, rejected, isolated communities of poverty and revolt;- and (3) the internal Police problems of recruitment, training, research and scientific development - each representing its peculiar difficulties which seldom are measured in terms of their respective relationships to the total picture.

If there is, or can be inspired, an honest desire to view this total perspective of our human relations problem as related to Police, we must start with certain basic assumptions upon which agreement may be found. I submit that Unequal employment opportunities, poor educational facilities and services, neglected, substandard housing, chronic poverty and community indifference, present to us the



acid test of the viability of our concept of democracy, as identified in our so-called free, competitive economic system. I submit that such a free, competitive society does not exist as long as any group of law-abiding citizens may be excluded from full participation in all its competitive and non-competitive features, just because of its minority group identity. I further submit that our local and national willingness or unwillingness, our ability or inability, to meet present day ferment and rebellion, with calmness, judiciousness, fairness and an intelligent approach to a complex but soluble problem, will be the acid test of our personal and societal integrity, in what purports to be our search for Law and Order, with Justice, in the American scene.

Throughout the world there is a lingering faith in the ability of man to bring his intelligence into a position of control over his desires and his passions. Our efforts in United Nations; our discussions with the Soviet Union on nuclear and arms race controls; our current conferences in Paris over the Viet Nam stalemate - all are testimony to this faith, based upon these hopes. But our faith seems to fail us as we contemplate the confrontations between Police and minorities in the home community where one may see so much of suspicion and distrust, fear, open conflict and violence. Here, we see too little evidence that hope, reason or desire for open communication between adversaries....; for the seeking out of mutually agreeable solutions....; for the adoption of scientific rather than military techniques....; are being utilized to reduce the antagonisms that neglect in the past has permitted to flourish and multiply. Your holding of this seminar in Tampa serves to revive hope and renew faith that here we are willing and able to embark upon this mature course of action. The test of your integrity of purpose will be your willingness or desire to continue this experience until real communication can be caused to lead to real understanding.

As I conclude, may I express the hope that your discussions will be enlightened and constructive, rather than heated and purposeless; that each participant will guard his own tongue as carefully as he weighs critically that which comes from the tongue of others; that you will embark upon the courageous, honorable course of rigid self-examination as you engage in discussion. I hope that all will attempt to resist the common temptation and childish practice of seeking scapegoats for that which was and is - - the "You're to blame" kind of cry-baby accusation - - and that you will concentrate upon examining the validity of the several basic conditions held to be responsible for our situation - and how we may cope creatively and constructively with them. This caustic reference to childhood expressions is merited by the childish return to name-calling indulged in by many of those claiming to be

concerned with social justice - names such as "jig", "Nigger" and "burr-head" widely employed on the one side, and "pigs" and "gestapo" as widely used on the other. In the very serious task of social reform, there is no room for the games children play!

These observations come from the depths of my heart, because I have lived long enough and dangerously enough to note the futility of brow-beating and bulldozing, when cooperation is the means by which men get things done. The satanic art of creating more and more enemies, whether by police or by minority spokesmen, is not designed to bring peace and healthy resolve to problems, even though it is a demonstrated fact of history that too frequently cooperation has been denied or withheld until resort to revolutionary action remained as the only tool with which to open the door to that communication so willfully withheld. (Late Pres. Kennedy)

I firmly believe that in the wildly spinning world of today, the test of the maturity, integrity and intelligence of any opposing forces, is not whether they presently co-exist in peace or in turmoil, as such, but rather, how honestly and courageously and diligently they are willing to work in a cooperative, continuing quest for understanding, as the way to permanent and glorious peace.

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